

Testimony of Tom Knox  
Chairman of the Board for We Care America  
June 14, 2005

Good Morning Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the privilege of testifying today before your Committee. I'm Tom Knox, Chairman of the Board for We Care America, a faith-based nonprofit. I bring you greetings from the entire senior leadership team of We Care America, all of whom are in California, providing technical assistance to 115 community-and faith-based groups as part of our Compassion Capitol Fund Grant.

Dave Donaldson started We Care America in 2001. Dave started We Care America, as well as another nonprofit called Convoy of Hope, because he saw first hand the power of love provided by local people of faith. Dave's father was tragically killed by a drunk driver early in his life. His mother, though seriously injured, struggled mightily to sustain Dave and his siblings. Her heroic efforts were greatly aided by the safety net of government, local churches, community groups and even corporations that provided the food, clothing, companionship and mentoring Dave and his family so desperately needed. Dave's goal in starting We Care America was to provide guidance and expertise to similar organizations with the same capacity to love, but which lacked the resources and capacity of large non-profits. Our continuing mission at We Care America is to unite the efforts of leaders, churches, organizations, government and corporations to provide effective solutions and bring lasting change to spiritual and social crises that affect so many.

We Care America continues to be a strong supporter of the Administration's Faith-Based and Community Initiative. We see this Initiative as taking a step to the "Shining City on a Hill" so eloquently described by President Reagan. Its combination of public resources with the love and compassion of faith-based and community organizations is powerful, and transformative. We have helped more than 140 non profits garner first time funding from the federal government and disbursed more than 10 million dollars to these groups. In southern California – our region for the Compassion Capitol Fund, we help more than 40 ministries and have trained more than 4000 groups to date on capacity-building issues.

One transformative agency partnering with We Care America is Templo Calvario, the largest Hispanic church in America. Templo Calvario is located right next to an empowerment zone in Santa Ana, California, an area in which 80% of the residents are foreign-born and live in poverty. To answer some of the needs of his neighbors, Rev. Danny DeLeon started Obras De Amor – Works of Love – a benevolence program that provides groceries, clothing, furniture, counseling, referrals and emergency assistance to 250 families. In addition, Obras de Amor operates after-school centers for elementary school children, sponsors teenagers at summer camp, donates backpacks loaded with school supplies, and distributes Christmas toys to 4,000 children.



Obras de Amor, of course, cannot meet every need in southern California by itself. Cooperation with other groups is essential. Therefore, in addition to delivering its own services, Obras de Amor provides groceries, clothing, furniture and occasional funding to a network of 60 churches and community-based organizations called the Kingdom Coalition. In turn, members of the Kingdom Coalition – extending from Los Angeles to San Diego- provide food, counseling, after school centers and furniture to 80,000 people a month.

Food and shelter are, of course, essential for sustaining life, but they are not the only essential elements. Economic development is also necessary. The partnership between Templo Calvario, We Care America and the federal government bares much fruit. The Church, aided by federal dollars through the Compassion Capital Fund, in 2002 started Templo Calvario Community Development Corporation. This community development corporation ("CDC") focuses on:

- Affordable housing;
- Business and job creation;
- Education (a charter school in partnership with the Santa Ana Unified School District);
- Youth programs;
- A Senior Service Enterprise that provides home care, transportation and other services to seniors;
- A community fair for more than 100 community organizations

We Care America provides technical assistance to the Templo Calvario CDC. Through a three year Compassion Capitol Fund grant, Templo has about 20 organizations that it, in turn, is helping to grow with We Care's help.

Although the Administration has at least temporarily removed many barriers to public funding of faith-based and community organizations, some barriers still remain. Just this past week, Rev. DeLeon was in town and recounted to one of our staffers that he faces barriers frequently at the state and local level. Rev. DeLeon said that he needs to "educate" state and local officials regularly that it is okay for them to partner with a 501(c)(3) and provide services to the most vulnerable in his community.

At We Care we are proud to partner with ministries and community organizations that do a lot to provide solutions in their neighborhoods. Barriers, however, remain. The simple fact that we can't rattle off a hundred examples is evidence that the Initiative's detractors have had a chilling effect on providing a level playing field for faith-based organizations to provide social services.



Through the Compassion Capitol Fund, the capacity of many charities on the front lines has been raised, and the charities are delivering more aid, with more accountability, to our nation's poor and needy. As their capacity increases, these neighborhood charities will increase the competition for public funds, which should help the taxpayer in addition to the poor and needy.

However, whether it's in the housing market, providing substance abuse treatment or even after-school programs; there must be a concerted effort to communicate the principles of the faith and community-based initiative down to the state and local level that the Sword of Damocles should not be fear of litigation that stops providers from being successful. And that hiring rights are long held historic traditions in all faith communities in this nation and that voucherizing social services may be the most effective way to navigate the current landscape.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee.

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